



City of Alexandria Open Space Plan Update

In May 2003 the City Council adopted the Open Space Plan chapter of the City's Master Plan. At the time, the Open Space Plan provided a framework for moving ahead both to preserve and enhance the City's existing open space and to obtain the additional land area Alexandria needed to sustain quality of life for future generations. The City has had significant success implementing this plan over the past ten years, increasing public open space by just over 100 acres and making "open space" one of the City's top priorities in Alexandria's Strategic Plan. In order to continue this success, and in response to evolving demands on existing open spaces in the City, new approaches and updated recommendations to implement the Plan's goals should be considered an essential component of Alexandria's ongoing quality of life.

The 2003 Open Space Plan

The Open Space Plan established a framework for addressing Alexandria's short and long term open space needs. It defined an approach that maximized the City's limited open space opportunities by creating a system to build upon the City's dense, urban condition. The Plan identified a critical need to add another 100 acres of public open space in ten years (by 2013) in order to maintain the amount of open space per resident (7.3 acres/1,000 residents) at the time of its approval. In addition, the Plan framed the initiative for Alexandria with a list of 15 simple and direct goal statements:

- Goal 1. Protect and enrich existing parks
- Goal 2. Develop innovative opportunities for creating additional open space
- Goal 3. Complete implementation of the Potomac River Waterfront Plan
- Goal 4. Protect and expand the stream valleys and other environmentally sensitive areas
- Goal 5. Create an open space network in new development areas
- Goal 6. Protect and preserve institutional open space
- Goal 7. Maximize use of public school open space areas
- Goal 8. Preserve and protect cemeteries
- Goal 9. Create public open space from vacant land
- Goal 10. Link and expand pedestrian, bicycle and trail system
- Goal 11. Enhance streetscapes and gateways
- Goal 12. Expand citywide street tree program and protect existing trees and woodland areas
- Goal 13. Encourage the creation of Civic Parks at and adjacent to Metro stations
- Goal 14. Beautify interchanges and highways corridors
- Goal 15. Protect privately owned open space

Finally, the Plan listed Priority Actions, and discussed funding and implementation measures for each of the 15 goals, many of which have been completed between the time of the Plan's approval in 2003 and 2013.

What We've Achieved So Far (2003-2013)

Since the inception of the Open Space Master Plan in 2003, the City has set forth and achieved many of the goals outlined in the plan. Staff has worked with property owners to protect a number of the significant open space sites identified in the Plan as well as additional open space sites throughout the city. Important sites that have been protected include:

- The acquisition of three of the Waterfront/Strand parcels;
- The acquisition of and improvements to four parcels along Mount Vernon Avenue and adjacent to Four Mile Run;
- Acquisition and development of new park at 2600 Business Center Drive (Witter Fields);
- Acquisition of the parcels at Freedmen's Cemetery;
- Acquisition of Ivor Lane (Seminary Forest) property;
- Acquisition of and improvements to two pocket parks, 48 South Early Street and 1&7 East Del Ray Avenue;
- Acquisition of land to expand Holmes Run Park;
- Acquisition of an abandoned power substation and conversion to neighborhood park on Commonwealth Avenue;
- Acquisition of key parcel for the Braddock Metro Area neighborhood park;
- Acquisition of additional land to expand the neighborhood park in the former James Bland development;
- Acquisition of woodland area for a park on Polk Avenue;
- Conservation easements on five properties through partnership with the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust;
- Historic Preservation Open Space Easements through Alexandria's Historic Preservation Easement Program;
- Significant open space acreage created and/or protected with public access easements through the City's development process; and
- A number of properties dedicated to the City by private property owners for use as parks/open space.

As of January 2013, the City achieved the addition of 103 acres of open space – just over the 100 acre goal. With this achievement of the 100 acre goal set forth in the plan, the City has maintained the ratio of 7.3 acres per 1,000 residents. The total additional open space acreage the City has attained/protected since 2003 includes property acquired or dedicated to the City; public open space easements through private development (and redevelopment) and conservation easements; and public open space approved in development plans soon to be under construction.

Along with the additional open space described, a number of other objectives within the Plan have been met, including:

- The creation of public open space networks through the City's Small Area Plans (Eisenhower East, Arlandria, Landmark/Van Dorn, Braddock, Waterfront and Beauregard);
- Adoption of a Bicycle/Pedestrian Master Plan, supporting and providing open space connectivity;
- The adoption of the Urban Forestry and Eco-City Plans, as well as the Four Mile Run Remediation Master Plan, all of which call for preservation and enhancement of City open space;
- An ongoing partnership with the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust to provide educational opportunities for landowners, provide outreach to institutional landholders, and to protect open space with conservation easements; and
- The Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities has developed a staff of landscape architects, architect and planners within the Division of Park Planning and Capital Development with a goal of creating and improving the quality of the City's public parks and open spaces.

Moving Forward (2014-2024)

As discussed above, the City has made significant progress towards the fifteen goals set forth in the Open Space Master Plan. In particular, the ten-year goal of maintaining a 7.3 acre per 1,000 residents has been achieved. The Open Space Master Plan was not, however, a ten-year plan, and the City of Alexandria must continue to strive to meet some of the unfulfilled goals outlined in the plan. We also must look at future projected population growth and the open space needs of those new Alexandrians. For instance, if we are to maintain the ratio above, the City will need to add another **183 acres** of open space by the year 2023 (based on recent census estimates for population growth).

Of these 183 acres, the City has made headway with planned public open space within recently approved Small Area Plans that has not been accounted for in current open space figures (Landmark/Van Dorn, Waterfront, Braddock and Beauregard Small Area Plans). With implementation of these plans, an additional 58 acres of public open space will be provided. In order to attain the remaining 125 acres (183 needed minus the 58 provided through future implementation of Small Area Plans), the City will need to continue its current efforts as well as explore more innovative approaches to increasing public open space.

As discussed above, over the past ten years, the City has achieved significant success toward meeting the goals set forth in the 2003 Open Space Master Plan. Hitting the ten year mark, however, is an important opportunity to review and revise the implementation measures also set forth in the Plan. Beginning in Spring 2013, an interdepartmental team spent the past year researching and exploring a series of refined recommendations and best practices in an effort to support continued implementation of the Plan. In particular, the following items are now underway:

- Regular meetings of the interdepartmental working group, including participants from Planning and Zoning; Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities; Transportation and Environmental Services; Alexandria City Public Schools and the City Attorney's Office.
- Utilizing GIS, determine and map underserved areas of the City, currently not served with public open space within a ¼ mile radius.
- Utilizing GIS, determine and map vulnerable natural resource areas as candidates for additional protection.
- Development of a work plan for the completion of a Natural Resource Management Plan for Alexandria.
- Working with the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust, the RPCA Division of Natural Resources, the Alexandria City Public Schools and the Office of Environmental Quality, develop a collaborative outreach and education program, strongly emphasizing the protection of open space in the City.
- Utilizing the RPCA Division of Park Planning's internship program, research and document best practices in the creation of public open space in urban areas across the region and the country and produce a feasibility analysis of each for Alexandria.
- Development of a policy (or set of policies) to guide successful fulfillment of new stormwater requirements, while protecting and preserving public open space.

With the above tasks completed or underway, **along with ideas from the community**, staff can provide City Council with an actionable plan for the creation and protection of open space in the next ten years.

To share your ideas, please participate in the activities today and fill out a survey (online: <http://alexandria.Open-Space.sgizmo.com/s3/> or in person).

For additional information, contact Laura Durham, Open Space Coordinator, at 703.746.5493 or laura.durham@alexandriava.gov.